

VZCZCXRO0629
RR RUEHPA
DE RUEHAR #2578/01 2991102
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
R 261102Z OCT 06
FM AMEMBASSY ACCRA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 2827
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/CDR USEUCOM VAIHINGEN GE
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ACCRA 002578

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 10/26/2016

TAGS: [GH](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT RAWLINGS PREDICTS GHANA READY TO
EXPLODE

Classified By: PolChief Scott B. Ticknor for reasons 1.5 d and e.

11. (C) Summary: On October 12, DCM (as Charge) paid an initial courtesy call on former President Jerry John Rawlings, his wife and other NDC leaders at Rawlings' residence. Rawlings and his colleagues attacked the Kufuor government as ethnically biased, corrupt and autocratic. He likened Ghana to a room filled with gas, ready to explode in frustration with the light of a match. He said the 2008 election may be violent, raising the possibility the NPP may kill him. He thought the U.S. had "wised up" to Kufuor's problems but that hatred toward the NPP in Ghana was turning into hatred toward the United States. This was vintage Rawlings: booming, erratic and fiercely anti-NPP. His portents of violence are not new, but remain disturbing because -- as bizarre and out-of-touch as he seems at times -- Rawlings still commands a significant following in Ghana. End summary.

Kufuor as Brutal Dictator

12. (C) The Kufuor government is consumed with depicting Rawlings as "a living nemesis", using "fear and terror" to stay in power, according to former Foreign Minister Victor Gbeho. Corruption is pervasive, justice is selective, politics is ethnically-biased, and the GOG is blinded by a sense of "divine right" typical of Ashantis, he said. Former Deputy Defense Minister Tony Aidoo criticized the Kufuor government as driven by "vindictive policies" and damaged by the current narcotics scandal. J.J. Rawlings described the Kufuor government as "brutal" and "dictatorial", criticizing his colleagues for not standing up to fight the Kufuor government.

13. (C) The NPP stole the 2004 presidential and parliamentary elections, according to Gbeho. Similarly, the NPP will rig the 2008 elections based on "trumped up violence", either by spreading false rumors of a coup attempt or by fueling crime, he said. Rawlings agreed that the NPP manipulated the 2004 results, stating "killings will take place" in 2008, including possibly his own death, because the NPP is desperate to stay in power.

A Room About to Explode

14. (C) According to Rawlings, Ghana is like a room filled with gas, ready to explode, but so far no one has wanted to throw the match. Between 2000 and 2004, he counted thirteen occasions when he believes a "lit match" would have exploded the country. Ghanaians across the spectrum, from the man on the street to military officers want vengeance, he said. Ghana is held together by a strong belief in God; otherwise,

"people would go berserk". The situation today is worse than before his coup in 1979 he said -- "I can see in officers' eyes they are ready to blow -- why can't you see it?"

Views of the U.S.

15. (C) While Tony Aidoo sharply criticized the U.S. for its "honeymoon" with the NPP, Rawlings interjected that the U.S. has "wised up to reality". President Bush was being friendly with Kufuor to "buy time", although his remarks about good governance in Ghana have cost the United States good will in Ghana. Washington doesn't understand the "capacity for trouble" in Ghana, he said. He was concerned that hatred toward the NPP was being transferred to hatred toward Western countries, including the United States.

Comment

16. (C) Rawlings may have some medical problems -- he trembles slightly and loses his thoughts frequently. He called on his colleagues for opinions and then insulted them in front of us. His raw outbursts and scattered ideas are typical, and as bizarre as ever. His views of Ghana on the precipice of a violent convulsion are vintage Rawlings, but contrast with the much more moderate, democratic views of many others in the NDC party. Rawlings retains strong influence within Ghana's major opposition party and as such can still whip up his own people to cause trouble if he chooses. The GOG is paranoid about Rawlings and at times dismissive. In a recent meeting with PolChief, National Security Minister Francis Poku downplayed Rawlings' bellicose rhetoric and style, saying it was necessary to tolerate the outbursts of the former President and not to overreact.

ACCRA 00002578 002 OF 002

While a meeting with Rawlings leaves one feeling unsettled and somewhat blown away (we got in very few words in this two hour meeting), we concur that it is important not to overreact. He is open and friendly to the Embassy, if often suspicious and critical of the United States, and we will continue to monitor his role, and that of the NDC, in Ghanaian politics.

BRIDGEWATER